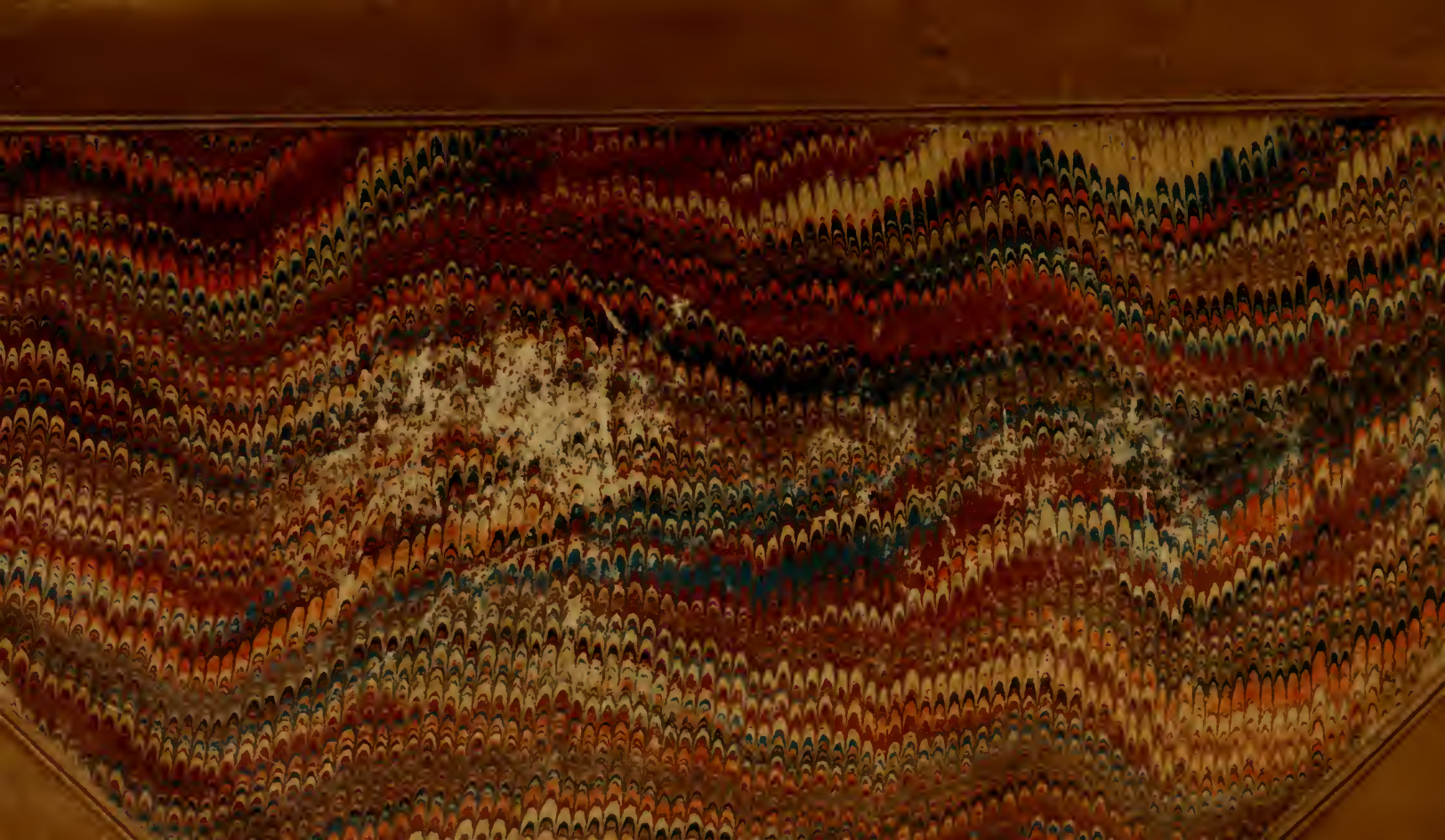

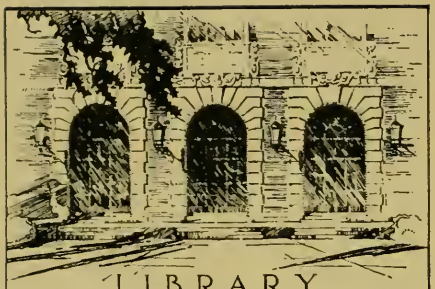

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* The "Plea for the Middle Classes" was the document which led to the foundation of the large groups of "Woodard Schools" which now (1884) include 3 in Sussex (Lancing, Hurst-Pierpoint & Ardingly) 1 in Staffs. (Denstone) 1 in Shropsh. (Ellesmere, dependent on Denstone) 1 in Somersetsh. (Taunton) & 1 I think in Yorkshire. J.G.T.

* A Plea for the Middle Classes by Rev. N. Woodard.

18

"THE WEEKLY OFFERTORY."

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

CHURCH OF S. PHILIP, CLERKENWELL,

ON THE

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,

JUNE 6, 1858.

BY

WARWICK R. WROTH, B.A.

INCUMBENT OF S. PHILIP, CLERKENWELL.

Oxford,

AND 377 STRAND, LONDON:

JOHN HENRY AND JAMES PARKER.

1858.

LONDON:
Printed by G. Barclay, Castle St. Leicester Sq.

TO THE

Members of my Flock,

AT S. PHILIP'S, CLERKENWELL,

ON WHOSE ZEALOUS CO-OPERATION

THE SUCCESS OF THE WEEKLY OFFERTORY

AT S. PHILIP'S

MUST, UNDER GOD, MAINLY DEPEND,

The following Sermon,

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF MANY WHO HEARD IT,

IS DEDICATED

BY THEIR FAITHFUL FRIEND AND PASTOR,

W. R. W.

UIUC

A SERMON,

&c. &c.

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1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2.

"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him."

One of the greatest practical difficulties at the present day is that of obtaining funds sufficient, *first,* for the support of the Ministry; *secondly,* for the expenses of Divine worship; and *thirdly,* for the relief of the poor, the maintenance of schools, and those other charitable institutions which tend to promote, in so great a degree, the well-being of the community. This difficulty is not experienced in this Parish only, but far and wide you hear the same complaint and appeal—"Funds are greatly needed." In this wealthy land, and specially in this the richest metropolis in the world, it is a fact, that numbers of the Clergy are receiving stipends not exceeding those of a common artizan—that there are 3506 benefices

with incomes less than 150*l.* per annum*—that many are not only "preaching the Gospel" without "living of the Gospel,"† but are also compelled to contribute beyond their power for the keeping up of the public worship of Almighty God, not only "feeding a flock," without "eating of the milk of the flock," but, to change the metaphor, "going a warfare at their own cost." The consequence of this state of things is, that manifold expedients are resorted to for raising the necessary funds. At one time it is the Bazaar, with its varied allurements—its articles very different from the "coats and garments"‡ made by Dorcas, and disposed of in a very different way. At another time it is the Charity Dinner, with its list of subscriptions read out, often amid loud applause for the donors of large, and impressive silence for the donors of small sums. At another, it is the occasional Charity Sermon, delivered by special preachers,—a plan very generally followed in churches situated as our own. These and other plans, more or less allowable, more or less objectionable, more or less secular or religious, have been the chief means by which, of late years, the treasury of the Church has been supplied. Nor can it be denied that at particular times, and under particular circumstances, large sums have been collected by such means,

* See the First Report of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. A calculation has been made that there are more than 10,000 out of the 17,000 Clergy of England and Wales, whose professional income is less than 150*l.* a-year.

† 1 Cor. ix. 14.

‡ Acts, ix. 39.

but they *all* have these fundamental objections—*first*, that they do not avail for the continual, regular supply of the alms needed; and *secondly*, that in the use of them people forget the true nature of almsgiving as an act of *worship*—as an offering of the substance to the Giver of all good gifts, for a testimony of our heartfelt homage, dependence, and love. The excitement also attending them is often most injurious; and just as physically extreme depression follows the excessive use of stimulants for the body, so spiritual depression follows the employment of stimulants of this nature. And yet, since people have been accustomed to give only when under the influence of such excitements, and not regularly and systematically, as part of the worship due to Almighty God, they regard them as indispensable; and though I believe there is a feeling springing up and increasing, that most of these means can only be justified by necessity, yet still, on the ground of supposed necessity, they are continued.

Now, brethren, these facts have made me turn my thoughts to this particular subject, and the course and result of those thoughts I purpose, with God's blessing, to lay before you this morning.

I have said to myself, "Can it be, seeing that funds are so necessary for the extension of the Church of Christ, and that the provision of funds is so difficult and uncertain, that God has altogether left us without indications of His will in this matter—without any rules how 'collections' should be made—or, at any rate, without principles from which rules may naturally be deduced?

And if God has laid down certain rules, or enunciated certain principles regarding 'collections,' can it be that the branch of the Church to which we belong has failed to embody these rules or principles in her system? And if we find that God *has not* left us without guidance in this matter, and that the Church *has*, 'concerning the collection for the saints,' taken Holy Scripture for her guide, does it not follow that we are bound, as obedient children of God, and faithful members of the Church, to follow henceforth the Scriptural and Ecclesiastical way, rather than ways of man's devising?"

Let me ask your earnest attention while I pursue this examination, and try to elicit, *first*, what Holy Scripture tells us on the subject of "collections;" and, *next*, see how far this accords with the practice enjoined by the Book of Common Prayer.

But, previous to entering upon these questions, I would prepare the way by showing the duty of every one giving alms for the service of Almighty God. This is not only a law for the Jews, but natural to all mankind. It is part of the eternal law of nature and reason—a ray of God's mercifulness infused into us with our human nature—one of the especially Christian "sacrifices,"* (as S. Paul terms it), or acts of worship, which every man is bound to pay. And, indeed, it is noticeable, that so integral a part is it of the worship of God, that the worship of the heart and spirit seems ever thus to manifest itself. Even before the Holy Scriptures were written, "Abel

* Heb. xiii. 16.

brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering."* "And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord, and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar, and the Lord smelled a sweet savour."† The patriarchs in like manner offered of their flocks and cattle. The children of Israel received the command, none shall "appear before the Lord empty."‡ "Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God, which He hath given thee."§ And passing over instances too numerous to quote, and coming at once to the time of our Lord, the wise men, the first-fruits of the Gentiles, when they "fell down and worshipped the young Child, opened their treasures, and presented unto Him gifts, gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."‖ Cornelius the centurion, that "devout man," previous to his conversion, "gave much alms," and "his prayers and his alms came up for a memorial before God."¶ Not only did "the rich men cast their gifts into the treasury," but "a certain poor widow also cast in thither two mites.** And our Lord Jesus says, "Give alms of such things as ye have;"†† and "It is more blessed to give than to receive."‡‡ And S. Paul, "To do good and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well

* Gen. iv. 4.
† Gen. viii. 20.
‡ Exod. xxiii. 15; xxxiv. 20.
§ Deut. xvi. 16, 17.
‖ S. Matt. ii. 11.
¶ Acts, x. 2, 4.
** S. Luke, xxi. 2.
†† S. Luke, xi. 41.
‡‡ Acts, xx. 35.

pleased."* And again in the text, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him." The law of almsgiving, then, is a universal law—a law written by nature in the hearts of men—a law practised by the Gentiles, who, "having not the law, did by nature the things contained in the law,"†—a law of the Jews—a law which our Lord "came not to destroy but to fulfil,"‡ promulgated therefore by Himself, and ratified and confirmed by His Apostles—a law, therefore, as binding upon all Christians in their degree as any other law, moral or positive. Of the duty of almsgiving there can be no question. No man, who believes his Bible, can possibly deny it.

This, then, being premised, let us see next in what *mode* Holy Scripture tells us "collections" should be made. Listen we to S. Paul. "Now concerning the collections for the saints (or Christians), as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him."

Now, first of all, notice here *the time of giving*. It was not left to every person's choice—though, doubtless, each could give at other times also, if he had ability, and opportunity offered—but, "upon the *first* day of the week," *i.e.* Sunday, every one was *commanded* to give. On the day of our Lord's resurrection—the day of the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the infant Church, was "every one to lay by him in store as God had prospered him,"

* Heb. xiii. 16. † Rom. ii. 14. ‡ S. Matt. v. 17.

for a testimony of his gratitude for the unutterable blessings, the root and beginning of spiritual life, which the merciful Lord had this day so bountifully shed forth.

Nor was this commandment confined to the Corinthians. S. Paul mentions that he had given the same rule to the churches of Galatia ("as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye"). Churches, be it remarked, in very different positions. Corinth, a rich and wealthy emporium of commerce; Galatia, a country comparatively poor and needy; and yet this mode of giving was suited for each.

The *time* of giving, then, was to be the Lord's day. The *place* is not mentioned by S. Paul in the passage before us, but there can be no reasonable doubt that the House of God was the place where offerings were wont to be made. It was in the place that the Lord had chosen to put His Name there,* where the Jews were commanded to offer to God. It was in the Temple that He accepted the mites of the poor widow.† In the Sermon on the Mount, addressed to us no less than to the Jews, He spoke of "bringing the gift to the *altar*,"‡—and "we" too "have an altar." It was when the disciples were assembled in breaking of bread and in prayer that those who had sold their lands brought the price and laid it down at the Apostles' feet.§ And in illustration of the

* Deut. xii. 5, 6. † S. Luke, xxi. 2.

‡ S. Matt. v. 23. Heb. xiii. 10.

§ Acts, iv. 34. See also ch. v. 1, 2, and ii. 42 sqq.

manner in which the Christians, immediately after the apostolic age, understood the Apostle, it may be mentioned that Justin Martyr (A.D. 150), in his "Apology," gives an account of Divine worship "on the day which is called Sunday," and makes special mention of the offerings of the congregation. "Each of those who have abundance and are willing, according to his choice, gives what he thinks fit."* The service was always accompanied with almsgiving. And this was regarded as a religious act—"over all our offerings" (says the same S. Justin) "we bless the Creator of all things, through His Son Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Spirit." It was an offering to Almighty God, and therefore presented to Him in His house and through His ministers.

And observe further, brethren, that the "*collections*" thus made were not for the poor only, though these were special objects of the Church's care, but the Clergy were supported, and other expenses discharged from the same source. In the early days it was literally the case, that they who ministered about holy things lived of the sacrifice, and they who waited at the altar were partakers with the altar.† And though S. Paul gave up his right of maintenance, he no less asserted that he might have claimed it if he would. "I *only*" (observe the general custom) "and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?"‡ And if, at the present day, the support of the clergy is provided for sometimes by tithes and endowments, which have scriptural authority, sometimes by

* Apology, § 87, 88. † 1 Cor. ix. 13. ‡ 1 Cor. ix. 6.

pew-rents, yet, believing as I do that these latter can be justified only on the plea of a poor expediency, and on no other ground, and that the house of God ought to be free to all, rich and poor, I cannot but trust that the time may come, ere long, when these may be superseded for the better and more scriptural way.

Such then, brethren, seems to have been the mode of giving commanded by the Apostle. "Upon the first day of the week"—so often as the Lord's day came round—every Christian, rich or poor, was to lay by him in store, as God had prospered him, and bringing with him this "present,"* was to "come into the courts" of the Almighty, and offer it to Him. And it seems, from what follows in this chapter,† that distribution was to be made of the sum thus collected by the Clergy and persons appointed by the congregation in concert.

And now let us turn from Holy Scripture to our Book of Common Prayer, and see what are the rules laid down by the latter, and how far they agree with the former. Our Reformers appear to have simply followed in the steps of the Apostle. The rules laid down are:—"Then (after the Sermon) shall the Priest return to the Lord's Table, and begin the Offertory, saying one or more of these sentences following, as he thinketh most convenient in his discretion." "Whilst the sentences are in reading, the Deacons, Churchwardens, or other fit person appointed for that purpose, shall receive the alms of the poor, and other devotions of the people, in a decent bason

* Ps. xcvi. 8. † 1 Cor. xvi. 3, 4.

to be provided by the Parish for that purpose, and reverently bring it to the Priest; who shall humbly present and place it upon the Holy Table."

"And upon the Sundays (and other Holy-days) if there be no Communion, shall be said all that is appointed at the Communion, until the end of the general prayer for [the whole state of Christ's Church militant here on earth], together with one or more of the Collects, ending with the Blessing." "After the divine service ended, the money given at the Offertory shall be disposed of to such pious and charitable uses as the Minister and Churchwardens shall think fit. Wherein, if they disagree, it shall be disposed of as the Ordinary shall appoint."

Observe here, brethren, how the Church of England makes special provision that every one, on the first day of the week, may have an opportunity of laying up in store, as God has prospered him; how it acknowledges that almsgiving is an offering to Almighty God, and thus causes the alms to be brought to the Priest, who is to present them humbly upon the Holy Table, with prayer to God that He may "most mercifully accept our alms." And the different Offertory Sentences, some of them having reference to almsgiving generally, some to the maintenance of the Clergy, and the cost of the spiritual warfare to be waged, and others referring to the poor, and "specially those that are of the household of faith," plainly show the "pious and charitable uses" to which the offerings may be applied; while the disposal of the alms is appointed to be in the hands of "the Minister," that is, the Clergy,

and of the Churchwardens, that is, the representatives of the laity, as we find was the case with "the collections" spoken of in the text.

Thus, brethren, I think it is plain, that the Church of England has simply embodied in rules the principles laid down by S. Paul; and if so, then are we not bound, as obedient children of God, and faithful members of the Church of England, to act up, so far as is possible, to those rules? And may not God have suffered us to see the hollowness of all human expedients, in order to teach us that, if we hope to prosper in our work, we must have courage enough to act in exactly a reverse way to the Pharisees (of whom we have read this morning), and, "laying aside the tradition of men, hold the commandment of God?"* This is my own firm and settled conviction. It is the conviction of many of the best, most faithful, and temperate members of our Church. The Bishop of Lincoln, for example, thus spoke in the Upper House of Convocation on the subject of Church Missions, both Home and Foreign:— "In the long-run," (he said,) "the question resolves itself into one of a supply of money. It has been a growing conviction on my mind, that the only way in which the Church can meet these wants is by recurring to the use of the Weekly Offertory. It is a mode most agreeable to the practice of the early Church. It is a mode accepted by almost every Church in the world except our own. It is a mode which seems fitted

* Mark, vii. 8.

for all the various conditions of our parishes. It is well adapted to the congregations of manufacturing parishes, where huge gains are frequently made in short periods, and where each one who feels disposed to return to God, in proportion to the way in which he has been blessed, has the opportunity weekly of doing so. It is well adapted to the agricultural parishes, where the farmers' gains are made by the aggregate of small savings, and where they are more unwilling to give largely than frequently, and where they may have the opportunity of putting their weekly mite in the plate. It is well adapted to the poor, who have the *right* to be presented with such an opportunity of giving. It is the only means that I know by which a large result can be produced without those continually recurring excitements, which cannot be kept up without a great effort." The Bishop then went on to state that a weekly collection of alms was the practice of the Presbyterian Kirk in Scotland, in most parts of the continent of Europe among the Reformed communions, and also that it had been tried with signal success at Kidderminster. Many other similar instances might be added.

Before and since my determination to commence it, numerous testimonies to its success have come before me. I heard only yesterday of one country parish, where it was commenced last Lent, and the weekly offerings have varied from 5*l.* to 2*l.* 4*s.* A most interesting statement has also been made by an excellent Clergyman* of the

* The Rev. W. Cooke, Vicar of Gazeley.

working of the Offertory in a parish close to London, in some respects similarly situated to our own, where he "ministered (as he says) before God to his people for six most anxious, laborious, yet happy years." Though it was a new district, not altogether separated from the parish church, and therefore the inhabitants had to pay rate and tithe to it, as if it had been the only church, yet, over and above what they had to pay to the Mother Church, they collected through the Offertory, and in other ways, no less a sum than 750*l.* after the first twelve months from the opening of the church, "mostly by six-pences, and shillings, and half-crowns, and with a few gold coins among the offerings, and with many coppers of the poor." And the Clergyman mentions, that besides all this they raised more than 1800*l.* for the building of schools in five years; making altogether about 1000*l.* a-year.

And now, having called your attention to these few instances out of many that might be adduced, because I trust, that even as S. Paul inspirited the Corinthians by the example of the Galatians, so your emulation may be kindled by an account of the well-doings of others, I desire to apply what has been said to our own parish of S. Philip's. You are aware of the difficulty we have always had in obtaining funds for Church expenses and other purposes, under our present system. The deficiency in the former alone for several years past has always been considerable — speaking roundly, some 20*l.* or more per annum; and I have reason to believe that this sum would have been much larger, had it not been for the careful and

economical management of our late Churchwardens and their predecessors. Now there is no fund whatever for meeting this deficiency. It is sometimes, indeed, supposed that it may legally be made up from the pew-rents. This is not so. These cannot *legally* be touched for this purpose, though of course the Incumbent may *give* any portion of them to supply the sum required. The consequence has been, that a few of the most willing among you, together with the Clergy, have been called on to contribute a very disproportionate amount, while many have given little or nothing. I see no probability of any change taking place in this respect, in so poor a neighbourhood, under the present system; and if, therefore, I were compelled to continue it, I should feel this state of things so utter a hindrance to me in my work among you—I should see so little hope of that work being carried on with energy under such fiscal disadvantages—that with deep regret indeed, and with many a lingering look behind on the kind friends who, "amid evil report and good report," have ever been zealous in all that is good, and willing and ready to help forward the work of Christ, and strengthen the hands of His ministers—I should feel it a duty to leave this post for another. But, after much thought and many prayers, I determined to try, in simple faith and humble dependence upon Almighty God, that which I believe to be the Bible way, and the way our Church at the Reformation enjoined upon her members. This resolve of mine to commence the Weekly Offertory was mentioned at a vestry meeting held some little time since, and was

assented to by all then present. Remembering, however, the ancient rule, "Do nothing without the Bishop," a deputation was appointed to accompany your Clergy to the Bishop of London, who, on hearing the circumstances, gave his sanction and approval. This being the case, it remains only that I beg the hearty co-operation of you all. After what has been said, I will not assume that any will object to the revival of a custom so Scriptural, so strictly commanded by our Prayer-book, and introduced with the sanction of your Bishop. But if objections should arise in the minds of any, I would ask them to do me the favour of calling on me, and I will, as God shall give me power, try to remove them.

The plan of collection will be this. Immediately after the Sermon the Offertory Sentences will be read, the congregation standing, and a collection made from seat to seat. After this the alms will be presented to God, through His Minister, in the prayer for the Church Militant; then will follow one of the appointed Collects, and the Blessing. In the evening, the collections will be made during the singing of two or three of the Offertory Sentences, and the gifts thus collected will be brought to the Altar, and the Service will conclude, as in the morning, with a Collect and the Blessing. At present the alms will be given for Church expenses; but if they should be as large as I hope,* we purpose to support, in whole or in part, other of our charities in the same way. Due notice of the objects,

* The Offerings on the first Sunday amounted to rather more than 12*l.*

however, will be given, and at any time a person may have his contribution applied to a special purpose by inclosing it in a piece of paper, and writing thereon how he wishes it to be disposed of. At the end of the year the Churchwardens will render an account of the receipts and expenditure.

And now, in conclusion, I would ask you all to give something, the poorer as well as the richer. "Let *every one* of you lay by him in store." If this be done, a large sum may be gathered in the course of the year, without being burdensome to any. The language of S. Chrysostom on this text is full of common sense—"He (the Apostle) calls the 'collection' a *con*tribution, immediately making out the thing to be easy. For when contribution is made by *all together*, that becomes light which is charged upon each." "The gathering by little and little hinders all perception of the burden and cost."

There are other points on which I fain would have touched in connexion with this subject, but the time warns me to leave something unsaid. I beg you to receive what has been spoken in love, in a spirit of love. The question I want to propose to you is this:—"If almsgiving be a *burden*, then, in very justice, all ought to bear a share in the burden; but if almsgiving be a *privilege*, then every one of you, even the poorest, has a right to have an opportunity of sharing in that privilege."

London: Printed by G. Barclay, Castle St. Leicester Sq.